

U.S. Department of Justice

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NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
Alexandria, VA
August 2, 2002

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Paul J. McNulty, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, announced today that immigration attorney Sylvia Anita Ryan-Webster, a 47 year old DC resident, was sentenced in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia by Judge T.S. Ellis, III, to 72 months of imprisonment and \$390,000 restitution for her participation in an immigration fraud conspiracy, and for using and possessing false and forged immigration documents. Ms. Ryan-Webster had been found guilty after a jury trial on May 2, 2002, in Alexandria, Virginia. Judge Ellis ordered Ryan-Webster to surrender to the United States Marshal in one week.

The conspiracy involved submitting forged labor certification applications and other documents to local employment commissions in Virginia, D.C., and Maryland, and to the United States Department of Labor and the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Those documents were used, in turn, to support visa and residency applications for aliens who wished to work in the United States. Between January 1995 and September 1999, Ryan-Webster filed 145 fraudulent labor certification documents on behalf of aliens to procure employment visas for them. The visas provided the aliens a priority to enter or remain in the United States. She purported to file the labor certification applications on behalf of employers and aliens who had not authorized her to submit applications and were unaware that the documents were forged. She charged the victim aliens significant fees or accepted services from them, such as housecleaning and babysitting, in exchange for providing immigration law services.

As part of this scheme, Ryan-Webster submitted labor certification applications to the government, nominating aliens for nonexistent jobs at various local businesses in Virginia, Maryland and D.C. She did so without the business-owners' knowledge, and forged the owners' signatures on those applications. For one auto repair business in Springfield, Virginia, which had one job opening, Ryan-Webster, without the owner's knowledge or consent, submitted applications for 19 aliens using forged signatures. During the scheme, over 100 aliens were charged between \$3,000 and \$15,000 by Ryan-Webster. In many cases the aliens did not receive a labor certification, and, in several cases, Ryan-Webster received payment from multiple aliens for the same labor certification. One victim who paid Ryan-Webster thousands of dollars to have her sister immigrate to the United States, told Judge Ellis, "We trusted her to help my sister come

to America, because she was a lawyer. I thought she would follow the law.” Another victim told Judge Ellis that she did house work for Ryan-Webster, in exchange for the defendant’s legal work to get her a green card. The victim told the judge that she worked 18 to 19 hours a day for the defendant, cleaning her house, but never received a green card.

Ryan-Webster also filed forms with the INS and DOL in which she knowingly misrepresented that she was an attorney in good standing, when in fact she was not. She had been suspended from the practice of law in the District of Columbia in 1996, and in Massachusetts and New York in 1996 and 1997. Ryan-Webster operated a sole practitioner immigration law practice under the name of Ryan and Webster in offices located in Washington D.C. from 1987 until 1999.

United States Attorney McNulty said: “Sylvia Anita Ryan-Webster used her legal skills to defraud both her clients and the United States. The same legal system she abused has now given justice to the victims.”

The case was investigated by the Office of Inspector General, Department of Labor, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Assistant United States Attorneys Robert C. Erickson and Thomas H. McQuillan prosecuted the case for the United States.